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The Great Sacrifice

"Greater love hath no man than this that a man
lay down his life for his friends"

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THE GREAT SACRIFICE

THE GREAT SACRIFICE

OR

THE ALTAR-FIRE OF WAR

BY

JOHN ADAMS, B.D.

EDINBURGH: T. & T. CLARK, 38 GEORGE STREET
1915

Printed by

MORRISON & GIBB LIMITED

FOR

T. & T. CLARK, EDINBURGH.

LONDON : SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, HAMILTON, KENT, AND CO. LIMITED

NEW YORK : CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS.

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TO

OUR EMPIRE'S DEATHLESS DEAD

HEROES ALL!

PREFATORY NOTE

WHATEVER value this little book may possess has been greatly enhanced by the beautiful reproduction of "THE GREAT SACRIFICE" which we have been permitted to use as an illustrated cover. The teaching of the picture has been duly emphasised in the opening chapter; but we gratefully acknowledge here the kindness of the Proprietors of *The Graphic* in so generously granting us the permission craved.

J. A.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. The Great Sacrifice . . .	1
II. Religion and War . . .	21
III. National Prayer	39
IV. The Divine Attitude in Prayer .	55
V. A God of Holiness . . .	71
VI. Military Barbarism . . .	87
VII. The Problem of Faith . . .	103
VIII. The Need of Patience . . .	121

I

THE GREAT SACRIFICE

I

THE GREAT SACRIFICE

This little book on "The Altar-fire of War" was ready for the Press before the beautiful reproduction of "The Great Sacrifice," published by *The Graphic*, was put into the author's hands. He at once felt that the inimitable touch of the artist had achieved what he himself, with but scant success, had tried to express in words. It had emphasised the truth that the pressing need of the present age is to read these two sacrifices together. The one illumines and interprets the other. The divine crowns the human. And when in any real sense the two are seen in their mutual relations, the darkest riddle of modern times has in large measure been solved. The European War is a riddle. To think of the very flower of our manhood being offered

as a holocaust to the Moloch of war is an anomaly and a tragedy not easily surpassed in its gruesomeness. It is so gruesome that those who know it best approve it least. They think of their dead comrades stretched upon the sward and refuse to allow their lips to utter what in their deepest heart they feel. Bow the head in silence! as the plaintive dirge, "The Flowers of the Forest," is borne on the breeze; for each hastily dug grave, like some "vast cathedral," receives the ashes of one of our Empire's deathless dead. Heroes all! we leave them in the Father's keeping; for instinctively we bring the two sacrifices together, and know, as the wounded hand of the one is laid upon the pierced feet of the other, that the covenant thus sealed in death can never again be broken. This is at once the inspiration of the preacher, the hope of the soldier, and the consolation of the bereaved. In home and Church and nation we become strong and self-possessed; for the divine and human factors have coalesced.

The Great Sacrifice

I

The human sacrifice may be closely akin to the divine in the true spirituality of its origin. This aspect of the subject has been duly emphasised in the following pages. Many of our young recruits were personally known to us in their boyhood. They came under the powerful influence both of school and Church, and knew perfectly what they were doing when they responded to the call of their country. To suggest that there was no flash of spiritual insight and no uprising of spiritual instinct when they decided to rally to the colours is simply incredible. No thoughtful, candid mind can believe it. In any case it cannot be allowed to those who refused to listen to the call to speak disparagingly of the motives of those who did. If there was little spirituality in the surrender of some who placed themselves at the disposal of their country, there was still less in the unpatriotic attitude of others who were content to abide by the sheepfolds! No one will presume to say

that the faith of the young recruits was the reasoned thing which afterwards it became in the trenches, but that a spiritual impulse was the inner spring of their free and unfettered choice cannot reasonably be doubted. Even in the hour of their first great committal, it was the one sacred touch that told.

Vividly the scene comes back to us when, at the beginning of the war, we were asked to hold our first recruiting meeting. It may serve as a kind of cameo of what has taken place on a larger scale all over the Empire. The pick of our young men from the neighbouring farms filled the little school, and the unaccustomed quiet that pervaded the audience all too painfully reflected the seriousness of the country's need. Still, little or no response was made to the eloquent and patriotic addresses of the various speakers. They were well-reasoned, urgent, and full of fire; and yet somehow they failed to strike the chord that really mattered. The *appeal to faith* had not been sounded; and it seemed as if our fine reserves of fresh young manhood were not to be tapped after

all. Then quite a perceptible change passed over the little room. One rose and said, "Some of you may be asking the question what I myself am going to do at this hour of crisis. It is one thing to lecture others on the greatness of their national duty, but what is the speaker himself prepared to do as an individual man? Alas, like many more, I am too old for active military service: and yet there must be no lack of public duty for all those who are willing to do their bit. One thing I will promise. If you go and represent us in fighting for the national cause, I will try to represent you at God's footstool in prayer. Both in the Church on Sundays, and in your homes during the week I will join with others in holding up your hands before Him who is the God of battles. And mayhap in the day of victory which is surely coming to our nation, they who fight and they who pray will rejoice together." What was the result? Thirteen young men from the surrounding farms rose and said, "Set down our names, sir; for as long as the war lasts, we will do our bit for King and

Country." And yet there are those who would suggest that there is nothing really spiritual in the character of such a decision. Respectfully we decline to believe it. The spiritual note was struck in the little school, and it was the spiritual note that told.

In the glow of after-reflection, one is grateful for that first wave of patriotic emotion; for already in the short interval of a few brief months two of the original band have gone to their reward! The man with the ink-horn by his side must have taken down their names in another sense than we deemed; and our act of worship, but especially their act of willing self-surrender, must have been divinely accepted and approved. For "what began best can't end worst." What began as a spiritual impulse in the village school cannot be cast as rubbish to the void. Stretched on the hillside in the bloom of their opening manhood, the hand of the one sacrifice must have been laid on the pierced feet of the other. For greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends! Born in the hour of a true, spiritual uplift,

the origin of the two sacrifices may have been as one.

II

And may not the human be closely akin to the divine in the true spirituality of its development? This is a second truth we have tried to accentuate in "The Altar-fire of War." What began as a genuine thrill of patriotism in the hour of enlistment is deepened, purified, and set to higher issues amid the soul-subduing experiences of the trenches. Six months passed within the danger zone produces a subtle but marked change in our young heroes. Bright lads become men; and men, who bear all the marks of having passed through a solemn purification by fire. And the subtle influence as thus depicted is communicated to us. It is not possible to act in their presence as we do act in dealing with those who are merely engaged in home defence. We are conscious of breathing quite a different atmosphere. Define it as one may, these young men have been

lifted to a higher spiritual elevation; and we do not wonder that the chaplains at the front are pleading with Church and nation to realise the significance of that fact. To say that the horrors of war have subdued and overawed them is but part of the explanation: it seems nearer the truth to add that these harrowing experiences, whatever they may have been, have only helped to roll away the stones, and to make our young men susceptible to spiritual influences of the highest moral quality. In fine, they have been following in the footsteps of Him who is "The Great Sacrifice," and even amid the bursting shells have caught a glimpse of wounds that transform and consecrate their own.

All this flashed through one's mind quite recently when travelling from Dundee to Edinburgh. The carriage door was opened at a certain station, and a somewhat diffident voice asked, "May I come in, sir?" "Surely," we answered, "room must be made for one who has so obviously been doing his duty for King and Country";

for as he stood there—a young Highlander in kilt and khaki, and with his full kit swung around his shoulders—he showed plainly enough that, after a brief furlough among his friends, he was again returning to the firing-line. Yes, he had been several months in Flanders, and knew all about the fighting at Neuve Chapelle and Hill 60, and was going back to join his unit in that particular district. But why should he be expected to face the guns a second time when so many young men in the old country were still bent on their own ease and enjoyment? Was it right that they should escape the fierceness of the fiery ordeal, by allowing him and others to sweat and sacrifice in their room? *Sacrifice!* he had placed his finger on the very word that makes all the difference to life and destiny. One could only turn to him and say, "You have no need to envy the lot of such men; they have refused to bear the marks of the nails, and can never know anything of the spiritual uplift they bring. 'Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall

lose his life for My sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.'" It was then that the light of a higher spiritual elevation immediately flashed recognition; and we knew, sitting alone in that railway carriage, that we were no longer strangers but comrades. And yet he could only express it in his own soldier-like way. Would I like to look through his little book? It contained his *will*, he informed me, and some other items of interest, and perhaps one like myself might like to glance through it. A soldier's will! I took the little book and read, "In case of my death, I leave all my belongings to my father . . . in . . . U.S.A." America! I ejaculated, do you come from America? Yes, I left my father and mother over there at the outbreak of hostilities, and came back to the old country to enlist. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why I feel a little sore when I see so many men in the homeland who refuse to do their bit. One does not relish the idea of the home-born being eclipsed by those who have come from overseas! True, I

rejoined; but in the meantime will you allow me to copy these addresses out of your little book? Some day I may wish to write to the old folks in the States, and tell them that once at least I had the privilege of talking with their boy. The tears were in his eyes, despite the shining of that other light, and as we bade each other "good-bye," this was his last request—"And, sir, while I remain in the trenches, will you also send a letter to me?" "Yes, comrade, I will," was my answer; for to-day, I might have added, I have learned a much-needed lesson, that even in life, not to speak of death, one may lay his hand on the feet of the great Sacrifice—in a word, that the first emotional thrill in any parish school may have deepened and been set to higher issues amid the soul-subduing experiences of the trenches.

III

But has any one the right to say that a soldier's death on the battlefield is a passport to life eternal? Is it true even

in these tragic days that the self-sacrifice of the trenches is enough? No, certainly not; no one on the battlefield itself ever thinks of raising any such inquiry. It is only in the unheroic atmosphere of the drawing-room that a problem like this can emerge. Valorous souls, who are face to face with death, know enough of the mystery to keep them humbly kneeling at the divine footstool. And in any case, the inimitable symbolism of "The Great Sacrifice" teaches a very different lesson. If the human sacrifice were sufficient, why introduce even in vision the thought of the crucified? Why lay the wounded hand of the one on the pierced feet of the other, if the heroism of a soldier's death were a sufficient passport? The question is its own answer. The problem of the present generation is not the shutting out of the Redeemer's merits, but the bringing in of the heroism of those who have laid down their lives for their country. How can these two correlated facts be combined in one divine synthesis?

It may point the way to a satisfactory answer if we carry the inquiry further back, and ask, what is the *link* by which any human being is made a partaker of the life divine? Let any New Testament believer peer into the depths of his own experience, and ask, what it was, or who it was, that gave him a good hope through grace; and what is his answer? Sir Noël Paton's wonderful creation, "De Profundis," may suggest the truth. Who can err in following its matchless delineation — the female figure, the soul, struggling out of the mists of the valley, with her beautiful gauze robe and butterfly wings all frayed and stained by the mire; and the peerless form of the Saviour coming round the crest of the hill, laying aside His crook, and with tender gaze, yet tense hands, snatching the well-nigh exhausted Psyche from the abyss. What an incomparable blending of the human and divine, human faith and divine faithfulness meeting and co-operating in one supreme act of covenant love! And yet how limp the arms of the human figure

are when compared with the strong, tense grasp of the Good Shepherd! It is not so much faith that saves: it is the Saviour; and therefore the teaching of the whole picture, like the teaching of "The Great Sacrifice," can only re-echo the appeal of the Psalmist:

> "O Israel, hope in the Lord:
> For with the Lord there is mercy.
> And He shall redeem Israel
> From all his iniquities."

There must be no uncertainty at a point like this. Let honour be given to whom honour is due. It is not even faith that saves: it is the Saviour. It is not loyalty even unto death that gives a title to life eternal: it is the atoning life and death of the Redeemer. Neither in the Church nor on the battlefield have we any plea of acceptance with God, save the name and merits of Him through whom we have the reconciliation. Any one who quibbles with this transcendent fact can be no bringer of good news to dying men. The vision of an all-sufficient

Saviour must be flashed upon the inner retina of the soul, else no gospel worthy of the name can be brought to the spiritually quickened conscience. All this is frankly admitted: no one can enter into life except through the finished work of the Master.

All this, however, may be admitted, and the inner core of our present problem be left practically untouched. The real question remains and cannot be evaded: what is the character of the link that binds the two sacrifices in one? Is it the faith that manifests itself in verbal confession, as in times of peace, or is it the faith which embodies itself in loyalty even unto death in time of war? This is a third point which is quite definitely raised in the course of these short studies; and more and more is the balance touched in favour of the latter faith. Both, no doubt, would be best; and both, in far more instances than we deem, may well be forthcoming; but even as regards those who have made no verbal confession, we can easily leave

one and all in the Father's keeping, knowing that

> "There is no place where earth's sorrows
> Are more felt than up in heaven;
> There is no place where earth's failings
> Have such kindly judgment given."

After all, it is the divine attitude that counts—not the creed of the schools, but the mercy of our covenant God. And if the felt presence of the crucified is abroad on the fire-swept battlefield to-day, it is not so much that man is seeking God, as that God in infinite love is seeking and finding man. And when we read these various thoughts together—how the spiritual impulse in the parish school has been deepened and set to higher issues amid the harrowing scenes of the trenches, and how the great Physician, as of yore, is ever seeking those who need Him most—we are content to turn once more to the peerless sketch of "The Great Sacrifice," and rejoice that the brave young life which has sacrificed itself for its country has placed its hand at last on the Saviour's pierced feet.

In origin and development, and now in death, the two sacrifices are as one; and thus we bow the head, saying:

"Father, in Thy gracious keeping
Leave we now Thy servant sleeping."

II

RELIGION AND WAR

II

RELIGION AND WAR

To harmonise ideas so diametrically opposed as these two concepts must be one of the standing problems of the present generation. The eternal value of the one and the unspeakable horror of the other! Who can find it easy to furnish an adequate solution? The horror of war is certainly inexpressible. After fighting all the way from Mons to the Marne, and back to Lille and Ypres, one of our brave young heroes came home on a few days' leave; and as he sat in the old home and allowed his thoughts to flash back over those harrowing scenes, this was the reflection that fell from his lips: "No, there is no longer any romance in war: the thrill and the glamour are gone!" Romance in war! was there ever anything of the nature of

romance associated with the carnage of the battlefield? Yes, when men fought in the open, and one could pit his skill against the prowess of a formidable but gallant foe, there was something in the swing of the tartan and the roll of the drum that touched and thrilled to higher issues the life-blood of the brave. But what can skill or prowess avail in this cold, insensate war of machinery? Yonder they lie in their dug-outs, like rabbits in their burrows, conscious only of the roar of guns belching forth death and destruction, and wondering when or from what direction the fatal bullet may be sped. No, the glamour of the fighting is all a thing of the past: there is no longer any poetry or romance in war!

And will this disillusionment ever reach the nations at large? Assuredly it will. One of the enduring gains from this grim harvesting in Europe will just be a truer estimate of the actual value of militarism. The specious trappings of military glory will yet be appraised at their true worth. The stricken nations will certainly come to regard

them as a relic of barbarism; and with clarified vision will turn to the nobler ideals of commerce, education, and religion, which alone have the power to make a nation great. The age of machinery in war will destroy for ever the poetry of the fife and drum, and the golden age will be brought appreciably nearer, when

> "They hang the trumpet in the hall
> And study war no more."

But that time is not yet! Sabbath by Sabbath we meet in our churches, and the age-long problem of religion and war is as pressing and forbidding as ever. Like Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim they confront one another, and dominate all our thinking; and we ask, and cannot help asking, how the two concepts are to be reconciled? Can we still justify the ways of God to men? Yes, we have the threefold argument of the nation, the Church, and the individual life.

The Great Sacrifice

I

There is the argument *political*. Very gratifying to every British reader must be the recent volume, entitled *J'Accuse*, in which one who describes himself as a German citizen lays the entire responsibility for the war at the door of the Teutonic Powers. "Germany and Austria," he writes, "are alone and exclusively guilty of having consciously and intentionally brought about the European War." At the end of the first twelve months, indeed, the organs of public opinion in Germany seem to have forgotten the real object of the conflict. They are not clear as to whether they should define it as "world-power" or "self-defence." The Kaiser himself in his manifesto, issued on the occasion of the anniversary of the beginning of the war, says emphatically: "Before God and history my conscience is clear. I did not will the war." This is the cue he would set before the German people to-day. It is a defensive war forced upon them by the Coalition Powers "for whom Germany was

becoming too great"! On the other hand, there was no such dubiety in the German mind before the war began. Bernhardi, who entitled one of his chapters, "World-power or Downfall," showed that he at least cherished no illusion regarding the imperial designs of Germany. And the extract quoted from the official publications of the German Military Staff by the author of *J'Accuse*, admits of no other interpretation. It was sent to the Emperor as part of a birthday greeting. "A victorious war," they wrote, "will create for us a German Colonial Empire by the annexation of Belgian and French Congo; and if Portugal should transform into action her hostile attitude towards us, the Portuguese colonies in East and West Africa as well. . . . Between Egypt and East Africa and the Anglo-Boer South Africa (which to-day are still English) there will then lie the unending girdle of our gigantic Colonial possessions from the Indian Ocean to the Central African Lakes, and from the Congo to the Atlantic. Of North-East and South Africa, we say that these to-day are still

English ; but who knows what will happen if the word of the poet is fulfilled : 'For the world will one day find Healing in the German mind.'" The fact is that Germany entered upon this struggle for her own enrichment and colonial expansion ; and was quite prepared to override the rights of smaller states and to challenge the armed might of Europe in order to accomplish her clearly expressed policy. To talk now of her being the aggrieved party, and that the action of the Coalition Powers had forced upon her a defensive war, is simply an attempt to invert history and to set the pyramid on its apex. Well may the author of *J'Accuse* conclude : "Never in the history of the world has a greater crime than this been committed. Never has a crime after its commission been denied with greater effrontery and hypocrisy."

All this, of course, was reiterated by our own statesmen in the early days of the war. They elaborated the argument with every possible detail in order to convince the nation that we had a perfect right to inter-

vene practically and with our whole weight in the European conflict. What the British reader will find peculiarly pleasing in this German publication is, that after a careful examination of all the evidence presented in the official documents of the various Governments, an intelligent and trustworthy Teuton should have come to the same conclusion. Here, at least, is one investigator who is quite prepared to uphold the purity of our motives in entering upon the war and the sincerity of our efforts to preserve peace. And in the light of this testimony the force of the argument political cannot be easily impugned or set aside. The argument is this, that instead of the higher sanctities of religion being imperilled by participation in this war, these higher sanctities would have been culpably surrendered had we refused to play our part. The European War is no doubt a terrible calamity, but had Britain refused to espouse the cause of freedom and of national and international obligation, a greater disaster would have befallen our western civilisation.

The Christian religion itself would have been discarded as effete. The very leaven of society would have lost its saving efficacy; and the Empire for which our sons are now dying in thousands would not have been worth the sacrifice. Religion and war do seem to be concepts which are diametrically opposed the one to the other; but in the present instance no reconciliation is needed. Righteousness, the alone essential thing in the world, is the saving salt of both.

II

Then we have the argument *ecclesiastical.* Meeting in our churches week by week, we cannot be grateful enough for the fact emphasised by our statesmen that in this colossal struggle for the liberties of Europe the British Empire is unquestionably on the side of right. There must be no sign of wavering at a point like this. We stand for the ideals which the great Head of the Church has always approved and sanctioned, and God helping us we can do no other. But is this the only way in which the great

world-tragedy may appeal to God's sacramental host? Does the justice of the national cause exhaust the possibilities of the national obligation? No, when read in the light of Israel's history, being on the side of Jehovah is but one thing; to be worthy of being used as his instrument is another. And probably for the sake of that greater worthiness, the Church may be able to find another reason for humbly acquiescing in the present war. She will find in it the necessary discipline for purifying the Church herself, and for lifting the entire nation to a higher level.

Israel's history is full of teaching from this instructive standpoint. With all her faults she was the nation whom Jehovah had chosen as his instrument. And as compared with Assyria or Egypt she was the people that stood for ideals which were sure to bless humanity. Why, then, should the Assyrian be permitted to invade her borders, and harass and despoil her population at his pleasure? Why? Because the nation which is honoured to stand for righteousness must

be worthy of her high calling. She must rise to a higher standard of moral and civic obligation than the nations around. Like the sweet Psalmist of Israel, the man after God's own heart, she might be the nation after God's own heart ; but just because of this she must abide the scrutiny of a far more searching test. And if she failed under this test, it would serve no good purpose to plead that she was no worse than others ; she must be vastly better—she must be worthy of her divine training and destiny. Hence whatever might happen to the Assyrian invader, this was the prophetic message to Israel herself—"You only have I known of all the families of the earth ; therefore I will punish you for your iniquities."

And is this the test that Britain and all the European nations must abide to-day ? It is. The Christian religion means this or nothing. The daily Press may not remind us of this fact, but this is the faith and function of the Church. She must remind us in season and out of season that victory will only reward and crown our efforts when we and our allies

deserve it. To be on the side of right is but one aspect of the truth: the other is that God's instruments must be worthy of their election. Hence when one of the Church's laymen prayed at the beginning of the war: "O God, we pray for Belgium, as it is our duty to do, though we cannot forget the Congo atrocities; and we pray for our gallant ally, France, in her hour of need, though we cannot forget how she surrendered her Sabbath and entered upon this war as a professed atheistical nation; and we pray for ourselves under this awful European menace, though we cannot forget the opium traffic in China, and the drink traffic and other social evils within our own borders; so that if it please Thee to discipline and humble us by means of this great European conflagration, we can only bow the head and worship, and say: 'It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth to him good,'"—when one of our shrewd Christian laymen prays thus, or when the Church herself in the exercise of her spiritual functions reminds the nation of these same grim facts, we can only confess that we

felt then, and feel still, that in this need of a solemn purification in Church and State, we have got another clear indication as to the divine plan and purpose in the war. It has come to chasten, purify, and instruct the nation. It has come to make us a polished shaft for His quiver. And our modern Israel, like ancient Zion, will once again be arrayed in her festal attire, when she has truly returned to the God of her fathers, and resolutely purged her national and civic life. This is the argument ecclesiastical. Instead of the discipline of war being inconsistent with the higher things of the faith, the fiery ordeal is found to be divinely necessary if the moral forces in humanity are to be adequately reinforced. No reconciliation between the two concepts is really required. A great purification in the body politic is the demand and the secret of both.

III

To complete the cycle, we have also the argument *individual* and *personal*. The prosperity of the nation and the welfare of the

Church are in the last resort broad-based in the loyalty and self-sacrifice of the individual man. And at this point again we have a remarkable agreement between religion and war. Whatever be the influence of peace, it is unquestionably true of both religion and war that they are equally and mutually insistent on the paramount need of altruism. Each man ought to dedicate his life to a great and worthy cause. Anything like selfishness or the love of personal ease is shrivelled up in the flame of a whole-hearted devotion. The two concepts, instead of being antagonistic, are at one in accentuating this imperious summons. The suppression of self and the service of the Commonwealth are equally the demand of both.

In times of peace the development of the individual life may be entirely different. Conscious of no pressing appeal to espouse the cause of others, the pursuit of one's own interest may usurp the whole of one's time and energy, and the imperative call to love one's neighbour as oneself is almost certain to be overlooked. No moral vigour is

developed in the soul. No vital principles, like iron drops, are infused into the life; and instead of growing up with the glow of health and the grip of giants, the rising generation is in grave danger of becoming a decadent race, intent simply on the pursuit of amusement or of sport. Nothing could be more calamitous than this in the experience of any nation: and no marvel if a healthy coalition between religion and war is sometimes designed to prevent it.

The summons of the world-war is assuredly the call of a lifetime. Each individual has the chance, during this crisis, of proving himself heroic. This is the atmosphere in which heroes are bred; and both in the trenches and in the workshop, in the home and in the church, each soul may be braced to play the hero's part by throwing himself into the swim of these great eternal interests. One remembers the ardent longings of one's youth, how earnestly we discussed the strenuous epochs of the past, and envied the men who had taken any real part in the shaping of the nation's history. As con-

trasted with those soul-stirring eras, the more prosaic character of our own times seemed as nothing in our eyes: we were condemned to the hum-drum and the commonplace! It is equally certain that in the colleges and workshops of the future the same sentiments will be expressed regarding the fateful experiences of 1915. Men will hark back to the epoch-making events of the great war, and speak of the heroism and devotion which in that era must have given a piquancy to life. It was then that the map of Europe was re-written, that nations rose and fell, and that human brotherhood and federation advanced by leaps and by bounds. Surely it must have been an inspiration and a joy to have had one's days cast in that strenuous period! It must have been the very wine of existence even to be alive! But is it? Is this the thrill and impelling passion that is laying hold of each individual soul to-day? If this is really the age in which altruism is born and heroes are bred, is this the holy fervour that is constraining and consecrating us? Or can it be that our

eyes are holden so that we cannot see the significance of the times? Is our spiritual vision so dim that the fair face of this wonderful visitation is merely glanced at and forgotten as the face of an ordinary stranger? It may be so. The appeal is to the individual man, and the individual man may make the great refusal. He may consult his own interest and comfort, whatever be the menace that imperils the well-being of the State; but if he does, the upbuilding of the Empire and the purification of the Church must be effected without him. The threefold call will be responded to by others, and the covenant between religion and war will be justified in the issue: but as for the man who is content to stay by the sheepfolds and to hear the pipings for the flocks, he can only quail even in the day of victory, for in the year of "the great resolves of heart" he came not to the help of the Lord against the mighty!

III

NATIONAL PRAYER

III

NATIONAL PRAYER

By Royal Proclamation, the present year opened with a day of national thanksgiving and prayer. It reminded one of the way in which the Apostle of the Gentiles sought to begin the conquest of Europe. On the first Sabbath of his stay in Philippi, he went out by the river-side, and found a small company of God's people gathered together for mutual edification and prayer : and as he joined with them in those exercises of divine worship, the spiritual conquest of Europe and of all western lands had begun. And so may it fare with this great conflict in which we and our allies are engaged. It is not armaments that win wars, it is the spirit in the heart of the men behind the armaments. So it was at Bannockburn, as the chronicler himself

admits—"Now when the two armies had approached very near . . . all the Scots fell on their knees to repeat a *Pater noster*, commending themselves to God . . . after which they advanced against the English." It was for this reason that our King and his advisers suggested that the first Sunday of the year should be set apart for this object. Not that the fervency of our prayers might alter the plan of the Almighty, but only that the divine will should become our will, and that we and our brave armies should act worthy of our sires! It was the spirit behind the armaments which they wished to inflame and consecrate.

And what are the constituent elements in all national prayer?

I

There ought to be *thanksgiving* for what has already been achieved. Looking back over these fateful months, we have indubitable facts like the following: The fact that Britain was enabled to draw the sword on behalf of international obligations and the

freedom of smaller States. One quails at the thought of what might have happened if Britain had failed at that crucial point! Had she elected to remain neutral, would there have been the same response of practically the whole world rallying to the side of right as against might, of freedom as against oppression, and of brotherhood as against tyranny? Britain's refusal to help would simply have put the lever into the hands of the invader; and the whole of our western civilisation would have been in danger of irretrievable disaster. That she did not fail at that crucial moment must ever be a cause of legitimate thanksgiving at the footstool of the great I Am.

Further, we have had the splendid response of all parts of the Empire flocking to the colours! Apart altogether from the help of our allies, the British Empire was never so much a unity as it is to-day; and the loyalty and heroism of our brave young recruits are beyond all praise. If a film of moisture has gathered in one's eyes at all, it has been at the sight of those crowds of young men,

saying by their actions at least, "Put down my name, sir; for I will do what I can to stem this modern tide of barbarism." How pure the emotion that stirs one's deepest being at the sight of such enthusiasm! Very vividly the scene comes back to us, one night in Aberdeen. Some three hundred Gordon Highlanders were being escorted to the railway station, *en route* for the front, by a crowd of sympathisers, and accompanied by two military bands. No wonder that as they passed, many a hat was raised in silent admiration, and many a prayer breathed that all this dedication of fresh young life might not be in vain. God be thanked that in every town and village we have so indubitable a fact as this!

And let no one forget in his prayer of thanksgiving the work already accomplished during these last twelve months. Even the bitter days in the opening stages of the war were in no sense fruitless. The thin khaki line we were able to stretch across Flanders was not snapped asunder by all the colossal weight of a well-prepared and ruthless foe.

Instead of being snapped it was able to hurl back the invader, beat him to a standstill, and even now is only awaiting the necessary reinforcements to push home its well-earned victory. And what was the force that rolled back the tide of battle? Not simply the might of armaments? No, it was the spirit of the men behind the armaments. Had it lain in the might of big battalions the superiority would undoubtedly have been with the invader. But yonder in the retreat from Mons and Charleroi, and in the counter-attack from the Marne to the Aisne, the old text was being exemplified that it is "not by martial might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord." So true is it that in all her prayers at the divine footstool a nation is not to forget to thank God for what has already been achieved.

II

A second element in all true prayer is the grace of *intercession*. A nation ought to pray for victory to her arms both by sea and land. There must be no note of uncertainty at this

point. "Some time ago," writes the Rev. J. S. Macdonald of Dalkeith, in a published sermon, "I received for use at intercession services certain forms of prayer, the authors of which were so excessively diffident that they provided no prayer for victory. I confess I consigned these feeble leaflets to the only place fit for them—the flames. If we cannot ask for victory in this war we have no right to be in it at all." On the other hand, what do we mean by victory? We mean the triumph of Jehovah's cause. As already remarked, we do not believe that the idea of prayer is to enforce our will upon the Eternal. It is to prepare ourselves for the acceptance of the divine will, and to place our resources in His hands for the accomplishment of His age-long purpose. We want no victory which in any wise would thwart that purpose. It is because we trust, like the prophets of old, that in this great crisis we have espoused His cause and are fighting for the ideals which He approves and sanctions, that we dare to come to His footstool and say, "O God, defend and

prosper our arms and give them a glorious victory."

Nay, let it be added with bated breath, this will teach a nation what to do with its *defeat*! We are sometimes asked what our enemies are doing in connection with this whole subject of intercession. Are they not praying to the God of battles even as we and our allies are? Yes, it is frequently stated that they are, and we certainly have no wish to see it otherwise. This is the one way in which they will be prepared for what is being prepared for them. They will know what to do with their defeat. Learning through suffering what the will of Heaven really is, they will make of their colossal failure a divine stepping-stone to higher things. Let it be accentuated once more what the real nature of believing prayer is. It is not the alteration of Jehovah's plan—let us be quite clear on that! The change, if any, is in the individual heart or nation that gives itself to prayer. It brings that heart or that nation into the approved spiritual atmosphere where it will humbly say, "Not my will, but the

will of God be done." And when that stage is reached, both the victor and the vanquished know what to do with the results. Be it victory or defeat, they bring it to the feet of heaven's great Lord; and bowing there in silent receptivity learn that they are no longer enemies but brothers. What are we to pray for? We are to pray for the victory of Jehovah's cause.

III

One other element in all true prayer must be the grace of *humiliation*. In this, however, we join issue with much that was said and written in connection with our national intercession. Many affirmed quite emphatically that no thought of humiliation should be mixed up with that day's proceedings. The example of the good Queen Victoria was cited in support of the contention. During the Crimean War, Lord Aberdeen had proposed a day of humiliation and prayer; but Her Majesty wrote him strongly objecting, and saying: "To say that the great sinfulness of the nation had brought about the

war . . . would be too manifestly repulsive to the feelings of every one, and would be a mere act of hypocrisy. Let there be prayer expressive of our great thankfulness for the benefits we have enjoyed . . . and entreating God's help and protection in the coming struggle. In this the Queen was ready to join heart and soul." But the reply to this must be obvious to most. No Queen, however good, and certainly no newspaper correspondent, however able, is any adequate or qualified guide to direct us in any such matter. We pay them all due deference in their own spheres; but in the things of the faith, the Church and the individual man must seek counsel in quite a different direction. We seek it in the pages of Holy Writ, especially as that is wrought out in the lives of the faithful and suffering remnant, who in every generation have shown that nations are lifted to a higher level by the sacrifices and sufferings of the best. The nations, because of their sins, had to be lifted to these higher levels. Like Israel of old, they had allowed themselves

to sink into materialism, worldliness, and pleasure; and when spirit-taught men saw this, they were not only prepared to confess their national unworthiness, but even to bear the hardship of a severe chastisement that the awful stains of a nation's apostasy might be wiped out.

The experience of France was referred to as a case in point. "Our ally, France, entered on the war as an avowedly atheistical nation. 'With one magnificent gesture we have extinguished the lights of Heaven which none shall rekindle,' declared the present Prime Minister of France when the Church was finally despoiled. The French armies went forth to battle, and the French fleets put forth to sea without a single chaplain. But for France, through the dread experience of carnage, there came the realisation that the State cannot do without the Church, and to-day the armies and the fleets of France have their chaplains; 20,000 priests fight in the ranks of her soldiers, and her churches are again crowded with worshippers."

It is remarkable, after penning these sentences regarding the marvellous change in France, that the same writer should go on to say that no feeling of *humiliation* should be allowed to find expression in our own national prayers! Ought no feeling of contrition to lie heavily on the spirit of France, as she turns in her distress to the God of her fathers? The question is its own answer. If no such contrition of soul dominates the crowds that throng her churches, then her so-called return to her ancestral faith is of no spiritual value. We are all in need in these days of a prophet Amos, a Zephaniah, or a John the Baptist, to come back and thunder in our ears the need of a heartfelt and genuine repentance. Let there be a rending of the hearts and not the garments! Let there be a whole-hearted return unto the Lord!

IV

For, once more, what do we mean by *humiliation*? It is at this point, unless we are gravely mistaken, that two perfectly

simple but totally different things are mixed up together. Do we mean that as compared with other nations, our national or individual sins are so heinous, that on a day of humiliation and prayer we can only hide our face in confusion? No, the accusation as thus framed we reject with disdain. We are like John Bunyan before his judges, when he defied them to make good the charges they had brought against him. Tested by any human standards they could apply, he challenged them to prove him guilty. And yet this same man, when he appears before his Maker, charges himself with well-nigh all the sins that ever disgraced humanity. Let anyone read *Grace Abounding* to see what even a good man will say before his God! And the same argument applies to a nation when it gives itself to prayer during a time of crisis. Out there in the open we defy anyone to prove that we have anything to be ashamed of in this war. Fearlessly we look the whole world in the face, and say, So far as our human lights carry us, we have stood for freedom, righteousness, and

honour, and God helping us we can do no other. But in here, engaged in worship, we are in the secret place of the Most High ; and the standard applied is quite different. We have to abide the scrutiny of the Almighty ; and feeling this, we humbly admit, what our fellow-men would never have made us confess, that—

> "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit ;
> A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

Kipling was right—

> "The tumult and the shouting dies :
> The Captains and the Kings depart :
> Still stands thine ancient sacrifice,
> An humble and a contrite heart.
> Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
> Lest we forget—lest we forget."

Why should anyone demur to humiliation in that sense ? Nay, how can anyone fail to feel this true compunction of spirit in the presence of the Holy One of Israel ? "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word."

The three elements in national prayer are all equally significant. Thanksgiving for what has already been achieved; earnest intercession for the triumph of Jehovah's cause; and, deepest note of all, this heartfelt humiliation in Church and nation, because, as contrasted with the God of holiness, we are so feeble and so unworthy instruments for the carrying out of His age-long plan! Entering upon our further struggles in this spirit, we need fear no evil. God will assuredly guide our nation and our whole western civilisation into a larger, fuller, and richer life. "The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth": and therefore whatever the war may bring, it will bring no less of His Presence to those who thus seek it, and whatever it take away, it will not take away His everlasting love.

IV

THE DIVINE ATTITUDE IN PRAYER

IV

THE DIVINE ATTITUDE IN PRAYER

During a great war the value of believing prayer is not easily overrated. The least pious among us has but little inclination to discuss the matter academically. The angel of death is stealing over the nations and breathing into the face of loved ones as he passes, and realising instinctively that eternal interests have suddenly become paramount, we humbly approach the divine footstool because in sober truth we must. Prayer is the vital breath of the perplexed soul. Fighting in the valley and praying on the hill have somehow become co-ordinated. Heroic sons are representing us before a common foe, and we in turn ought to represent them before a common mercy-seat.

There is no discharge in this war. We must either shoulder arms or hold up holy hands. The Hearer of prayer is also the God of battles: therefore let the sword and the censer co-operate.

I

The deepest fact in prayer is the attitude of Jehovah. This is the marvellous conception introduced into Abraham's prayer by the old Jewish scholars. They read not that "Abraham stood yet before the Lord," but that "the Lord stood yet before Abraham" (Gen. xviii. 22). But how could Jehovah stand before a man? Did not the very idea detract from the glory of His majesty? The pious in Israel winced at the thought, and emending the text as they believed to remove so palpable a misconception, they read and enforced the truth that it was Abraham who stood before Jehovah. Yet as a lesson in prayer how much more luminous and expressive the original text was! There is nothing finer within the whole field of biblical exposition. To feel this, let us try to visualise the scene as if actually unfolding

before our eyes. Abraham had accompanied the three "men" from the oaks of Mamre to the brow of the hill from whence Sodom could be seen in the distance. The fate of Sodom was lying upon their spirits. "Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do?" No, the entire land—Sodom included—belonged to the patriarch by promise (cf. xiii. 15); and therefore the fate of even one city must not be withheld from him. The two angels might be dispatched on their tragic errand, but the third and chief remained—*continuing to stand* (participle)—before Abraham, in order to give him the opportunity of uttering all that was in his heart. Was it something in the face of Abraham that arrested the divine speaker, and made him assume the guise of this waiting attitude? It may have been. The sublime prayer which follows seems to demand some such spiritual impulse as its necessary presupposition. Abraham was so stirred by the clear intimation of Sodom's doom that the longing to interpose in its behalf was reflected in his countenance. But, if so, certainly the deepest lesson in prayer

was being enacted before his eyes. Jehovah was waiting expectant to give the praying heart its chance. "Speak, O child of the kingdom, for the divine Master is waiting to hear thee." Everything was possible in the light of that supreme fact. The Hearer of prayer was standing before Abraham.

And is Jehovah standing before us at this critical epoch in our history? The very supposition may well make us pause and fill us with the glow of a great expectancy. Perchance the European War is about to effect what times of prosperity and peace have failed in producing, a heart-felt conviction that the divine factor is really immanent in the history, and that by terrible things in righteousness we are going to be transformed into a praying and God-honouring people. The need for such a transformation must be obvious to most. In times of prosperity we were all too prone, as in the age of the Judges, to do what was right in our own eyes. We sat in our tent door in the drowsy time of the day and reflected on our own greatness and serenity. We mused

with pride on our trade and commerce, on the unchallenged supremacy of the British Fleet, on our expanding colonial possessions, and on our growing prestige among the nations, and we rejoiced that in language, in empire, and in our far-flung battle-line, we were rapidly becoming the dominant race in humanity, and were certain to retain this foremost place for many long years to come. So we dreamed in our tent door in times of peace ; and even when the Giver of all good drew near, and would have crowned us with the blessings of His covenant, we failed to recognise the Giver in His gifts, and were content to receive Him as a common wayfarer and to entertain Him hospitably at our board. Busy with our own projects and pleasures, we did not notice the angel in the guest ; and He who might have transformed our feast into a sacrament was permitted to pursue His journey.

Unexpectedly, however, and in a very different guise, the divine wayfarer has returned. Arrayed in the garb of a refiner of metals He has drawn near to the modern

nations as once He drew near to Sodom and Gomorrah, and is surely refining them, as gold and silver are refined, by being smelted and purified by fire. Peace has been succeeded by war ; and as the disciplined peoples are being exposed to the purifying flame, the Great Refiner is waiting to see what section of the Church or nation will come to the golden altar, and pray as Abraham prayed for the oppressed and devastated lands. Where are the men of God to-day who will gather up the sorrows of this stricken age, and set them forth in impassioned entreaty at the footstool of the great I Am ? It is not so much soldiers we need, as priests of intercession—men who can turn round with that swift look of appeal which will at once arrest the attention of the divine worker, and open up new avenues for His work. It is not the whole body of the people for whom Jehovah is waiting. It is the men of the covenant whose hearts are stirred by great human interests, and who are now summoned to mediate to the perplexed nations the diviner meanings of the history. Where are

the sons of the prophets who will respond, as Elisha did, to the generous call of *his* Master: "Ask what I shall do for thee before I be taken from thee" (2 Kings ii. 9)? The divine attitude in prayer is never withheld from the faithful: "the Lord stood yet before Abraham."

II

The human response, as in Abraham's intercession, reflects as in a mirror the greatness of this divine attitude. Whether we have respect to its objects, its recognition of the divine righteousness, or the wonder of its answer—an answer plucked like a beam of light from the very heart of the storm—we have in all these respects a model prayer even for a time of war, and well fitted to impress other suppliants in the framing of their own earnest entreaties.

The intercession of Abraham is certainly a model prayer in the catholicity of its objects. The patriarch could pray for such dens of iniquity as the ungodly cities of the plain. There might be a few righteous souls found

within the city walls, but the vast majority of the inhabitants, even in that rude age, were sinners of the grossest type. And to one like Abraham, who was virtually an Arabian sheikh, and who hated cities and all city life, the mere fact that they were city-dwellers, not to speak of their evil reputation, was enough to put them outwith the scope of his deepest interest and regard. It is probably no exaggeration to say that it was against all his natural and moral instincts to make Sodom and Gomorrah the objects of his prayer. And yet with reverence and reasoned importunity he interceded in their behalf. How is this? The explanation is obvious. It lay in the power of the personal equation. Abraham had a near kinsman implicated in the life of Sodom, and the fate of the unhallowed city might mean everything to him. The patriarch was not unlike thousands of parents in our own land to-day who are agonisingly interested in the progress of this war. They, too, have a near kinsman within the danger zone: and it is not easy for a parent's heart to speak disparagingly of the

cause for which a brave young hero is prepared to lay down his life. Those who have no personal link with the line of trenches may take up a detached attitude towards the war and speak discourteously at times concerning those who are responsible for its management; but a son or brother within the fighting-line has a wonderful influence in broadening one's outlook, and instead of being critical of either the political or military situation they are ready to pray, like Abraham, for this modern Sodom, and to plead that victory and a lasting peace may yet vindicate and crown our arms. The personal equation, in truth, may lead the way to a wonderful magnanimity. Abraham could pray for Sodom because of his nephew, Lot.

And how impressive the same prayer is when viewed in the light of the divine rectitude! "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" As far as Abraham could judge, it was more in keeping with the divine rectitude to spare the wicked for the sake of the righteous than to destroy the righteous for

the sake of the wicked. The difference of numbers could not invalidate the force of this distinction. The ungodly in Sodom might be a seething mass, while the faithful few might be only a hidden and scattered remnant; but surely the moral governor of the universe knew how to hold the balance between them, and would yet allow the fulness of His mercy to triumph over judgment. "That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked." With all his solicitude, however, to obtain a gracious respite for the doomed cities, Abraham had no wish to see the matter settled on the mere ground of clemency or divine indulgence—a settlement indeed which might only infringe the claims of eternal righteousness, and give no moral uplift to the spared but easily enslaved people. No, he believed intuitively that no question is ever settled until it is settled right; and therefore he left the matter with Him who is the supreme Ruler of the universe, persuaded that in His wisdom and far-seeing care, He would yet establish and

ratify His divine sovereignty over all the nations of the earth. And no other ideal can be set before the modern European nations. We want no trumpery peace, which would leave unchecked the grave social perils which have so long vitiated the springs of our national well-being. The wide-spread worship of mammon, the insane rush after amusement, the tyranny of strong drink, the insolence of an aggressive militarism, and the consequent neglect of all vital and undefiled religion — these and such like evils which have contaminated the very breath of our modern civilisation, must be resolutely dealt with and excised from the body politic else no settlement worthy of the name will be found to have crowned or rewarded our efforts. In a solemn crisis like the present we can only betake ourselves to the hills of Hebron, and pray with the father of the faithful that the Judge of all the earth will take the matter into His own keeping, and so overrule and discipline the European powers that order shall be brought out of confusion, and righteousness shall cover the

whole earth as the waters cover the channel of the great deep.

Finally, we have the uniqueness of the divine answer. Abraham's prayer was answered both in judgment and mercy. The cities of the plain *were* destroyed; but as the priestly writer informs us in chap. xix. 29, "God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt." On the one side, he beheld the purifying fire descend upon the devoted cities, just as we, in these latter days, may see the purifying flame fall on all the Western nations; but out of that fire, like a sunbeam snatched from the thunder-storm, he saw the divine mercy framing an answer to his earnest supplication, just as we again may see emerging from the European War, a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. This view of the divine government can never again be absent from Holy Writ. The prophets will yet speak of it as the profound doctrine of the purified *remnant*. The severity of the puri-

fication they have no wish to minimise. It will burn as a flame : and many elements in modern, as in ancient society, may well be shrivelled up in it ! Social customs, ecclesiastical usages, norms of thought, and even moral judgments, may all have to be revised and finally recast, when touched by the breath of its fiery discipline. And yet out of it all a remnant shall survive, a spiritual nucleus which will form the starting-point for a new development, a living stock sending forth fresh shoots in the springtime, or a sure foundation on which may yet be erected the fair edifice of a new Church and nation. A bow of mercy is thus seen spanning the dark clouds of every exile, just as the never-to-be-forgotten promise of Gen. iii. 15 contained a presage of the Evangel wrapped up in the folds of the curse.

Such is the fulness of Abraham's prayer, even amid the exigencies of the present war. The God of the covenant is still standing before His people. He is waiting expectant throughout this time of crisis to give the praying heart its chance. Who will stand

in spirit on this modern hill of intercession, and as they gaze away eastward to far-spreading plains and mountain fastnesses, where the fate of nations is again being decided, who will turn round, as the father of the faithful turned, and catch at God's skirts and pray?

V

A GOD OF HOLINESS

V

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The writer of the article "In our Parish," speaks of a discovery or vision which came to many of the parishioners by means of the present war. For long years they had been living on the surface of things. Long years of ease had dimmed their vision. The church bell rang in vain for many of them. Those who had six whole days in the week to devote to their own pleasure began to devote the seventh also. The day of peace was becoming a day of unrest. Then with the suddenness of a lightning flash the vision came! The brilliance of its light rose high in the firmament of life, and burnt itself red into their souls. And as the result, the sanctuaries began to fill, all eyes were turned upward, and the devotional instinct was

found to be far mightier than reason. The smoke of battle had brought to them the great discovery: it had revealed *the face of God.*

Lord Tennyson was right: one's chief desire in life ought to be to get a nearer vision of the Almighty. This is the supreme need of every generation. If it be not granted in life, then let it be graciously realised in death—

> "I hope to see my Pilot face to face
> When I have crossed the bar."

But what is the nature of the God as thus revealed? Let us turn to the profound teaching of *Isaiah's Vision* to find the answer. How superb the language is in which that vision is portrayed! "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. Above Him stood the Seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory."

A God of Holiness

I

The dominant note in Old Testament religion is this note of *holiness*. It is the grandest energy working for peace or progress that ever came into man's history or into his heart. This is the high-water mark of divine revelation or of spiritual intuition. He who rules among the nations is the Holy One of Israel, whose brightness burneth as a flame. The Trisagion of the seraphim rose and fell in the heavenly court: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts."

In contrast with this, why has the faith of Islam so often failed as an uplifting force in humanity? For the same reason as ethnic faiths generally have failed. Not one of them believed in a God of holiness. The gods of Greece were simply magnified men and women with all their human frailties; and the god of Mohammed, a human despot who put everything to the arbitrament of the sword. To him might was right; and instead of being holy in thought and purpose he deliberately spared the sins the Arab

loved! And how could a people rise superior to the moral character of its deity? The heavens must be holy if ever the earth is to be pure. And therefore Isaiah came to Israel, and through Israel, he comes to us, and proclaims with no uncertain voice the inviolable truth of the divine sanctity. No greater truth for the amelioration of society was ever uttered: "Ye shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy."

This is just the teaching, however, that the inhabitants of Jerusalem persistently refused to lay to heart. They cherished the delusion that because they were the people of Jehovah no serious evil would ever befall them. They might copy the practices of the heathen around, desecrate the Sabbath of their God, and even in holy time pursue their own gain or pleasure; but no grievous calamity would ever be allowed to overtake them, for they were the children of the covenant, the nation whom Jehovah had called. Like the God of Islam, Jehovah would never forsake His own people. He might be displeased for a season; but in the

issue He would assuredly spare the sins that Israel loved!

And shame be to us in Christian lands if we have been gradually sinking into a similar line of deception—saying, like ancient Jew or more modern Arab, we will follow our own national ideals, pursue our own pleasure, put our trust in material gain, and even neglect the worship of God as a thing of no real moment—we will do all this and yet nothing very serious will happen; for the God of our fathers will not be strict to mark iniquity, or severe to check the natural growth of our modern civilisation. In the issue, He will doubtless be found on the side of the big battalions, and in any case He will surely spare the sins the Christian nations love! Shame be to us if this is the fetid quagmire into which the modern nations have allowed themselves to sink—trying to do without the Sermon on the Mount, following their own ideals instead of those inculcated by the Man of Nazareth, and seeking to shut out the supreme vision of a God of holiness! No marvel if something has been permitted

to break into modern life, so as to smite and shatter the vain delusion! Spare the sins the Christian nations love? Nay, it cannot be. To Arab, Jew, and Christian alike the arresting message comes: "Ye shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy."

To detect even the slightest flaw in the fabric the web in the factory is hung up against the sunlight streaming through the window. In this way the tiniest imperfection in the texture is easily seen. And this is what the Prophet has done with the moral character of his nation. He has compared it, not with the lax standards of the nations around, but with the unsullied purity of Israel's God; and his first exclamation is a cry of woe: "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." And yet in so expressing his apprehension, he has only placed himself in the way of a great uplifting. He has made it possible to appear before Him who is the hope and joy of all penitent souls!

For in that surpassing radiance of the divine holiness he has caught a glimpse of yet another attribute in Jehovah's character which thrills him with the rapture of a reborn hope.

II

He has caught a glimpse of the divine *mercy*. That also is a part, a most essential part, of the divine holiness. If holiness itself may be likened to the breaking forth of a brilliant light, so brilliant that it can detect the least flaw in the character, it is like the sunshine in another sense: it is the gentle warmth that woos the buds into blossom and clothes the woods and fields with all the loveliness of the summer. This figure of the light admits of a twofold reference. It may be applied to the unapproachable majesty of Jehovah or to the no less unparalleled splendour of His mercy. God is infinitely high, but He is also infinitely near; and both in moral sublimity and in matchless loving-kindness He is the One whose name is holy, the One whose garment is the light and in whom is no darkness at

all. Both elements are beautifully combined in other parts of the Isaianic teaching, where the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, dwells also with the man who is of a contrite heart and who trembles at His word. In fine, the greatness of His majesty is the measure of His grace.

It is this thought which thrills the Prophet with a radiant faith in Israel's future. The people of unclean lips will yet be purified and crowned. But how can this moral transformation be effected? Only by another profound element in Isaiah's vision—not the detection of sin by the divine holiness, but a growing fitness for service by means of a solemn *purification by fire*. The transformation is effected through discipline. Not even the boon of a divine forgiveness can be interpreted as infringing the validity of this principle. David was forgiven when he repented and confessed his sin at the rebuke of Nathan the Prophet. Nathan said unto the King, "the Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." Nevertheless, this was not, and could not be, the

end of the matter. The effects of the sin remained as a virulent poison in his family; and even though his personal transgression was forgiven, he knew to the day of his death that the sin whereby he had given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, had marked the beginning of his decline and fall.

And the same truth is written large in the experience of nations. The path of return to righteousness and national honour is not always an easy path. It is frequently along the pathway of a profound purification. A live coal from the altar is laid upon the polluted lips! What is the full significance of this act? In Isaiah's case, it was probably nothing more than a sacrament. It was a parable of what was to be applied to Israel as a people. What the glowing coal was to the Prophet, the dreaded Assyrian invasion was to be to Israel. That was the purification by fire which was to prove and sanctify the sinful kingdom. Assyrian armies were to sweep around her strongholds, and even Mount Moriah was to

become as the high places of a forest. Fiery indeed would the national purification be! Hence the Prophet could only quail and say, "O Lord, how long?" Was the land of Israel to be left utterly desolate? Was there no hope of ultimate recovery for the chosen people? Yes, there was hope; else how could one speak of purification? The very idea of purification implies a future of unspeakable hope for the oppressed and disciplined folk. The chastisement, however poignant, was but the sifting of a divine flame which was designed to separate the dross from the pure metal of Jehovah's people, until when the purging flame had done its refining work, a faithful remnant should be left as the nucleus of a more perfect Church and nation. The concluding element in Isaiah's vision would at last be gloriously verified. The oak of Israel which had been felled to the ground (ver. 13) would once more put forth fresh shoots in the springtime; and a new Israel would arise and flourish on the ruins of the old kingdom. A new era would be

inaugurated; and this, both in mercy and judgment, would be the real vindication of the appalling Assyrian invasion.

III

And may not something precisely similar be wrought out among the modern European nations? May not God-fearing men regard the great world-war as, in some sense, a necessary purification? In the modern age, may not the kingdoms of the world, like Israel of old, be once more subjected to a solemn purification by fire? Yes, away out in the coming years, men are going to see a nobler civilisation built up on the ruins of a discarded militarism. A new era is about to dawn after these awful war-clouds have been finally scattered—an era in which the long-forgotten Sermon on the Mount is to regain the place of honour, and when, in the righteousness and peace that alone make a nation great, the divine Man of Nazareth is to enter into His own. This is the widening horizon which the eye of faith may easily descry on the further

side of the darkness. And because it is, the servant of God can go to every house of mourning with the inspiration of a great hope. He can say to every bereaved heart, "Go forward in thought to the new world that is to be, and as you realise in measure the wonder of the blessed transformation, say, with a mother's proud boast, 'the one I gave up for his King and Country had his part at least in bringing about this epoch-making change. He paid his full share of the price that was necessary for the attainment of this goal. And therefore they who die and they who weep may well possess their souls in patience; for they shall yet share and rejoice together in the coming triumph.'"

The comfort of this hope may easily inspire drooping hearts to-day, if, in the meantime, we are willing to pay the price and to endure the purification. That is the present duty. In service, self-sacrifice, and prayer, we are summoned to place everything on the altar; and to all those who give of their best, the times are big with

the promise of what may yet be. It will yet be accounted a unique privilege to have lived through the experiences of the great world-war. Men will look back upon it in the next generation, and covet the advantages of those who had any part to play in that soul-stirring era. It was then that history was made, the map of Europe re-written, and the Church of God took a great step forward in winning the whole earth for the kingdom. The time of the great war, indeed, was the era when every man got the chance to live and fight and pray for righteousness' sake; and God grant that the future historian will be able to add, that all classes alike responded to the summons. May the Spirit of God breathe upon the whole nation, that, like Isaiah responding to his vision, we all may turn round as he did, and say, "Here am I, send me." In the solemn times in which we live, let us throw ourselves into the current of these great interests, and labour and pray and sacrifice for the truth!

VI

MILITARY BARBARISM

VI

MILITARY BARBARISM

Perplexed by the nameless atrocities perpetrated in the name of war, Bible readers are beginning to discover new light and guidance in the pages of the Hebrew prophets. A sufficiently obvious reason may be suggested. The present situation is in many ways a facsimile of the age in which those men of God lived and prophesied; and if they have used forms of expression which do seem remarkably familiar to modern ears, this is just what might have been expected. War is just war, whatever be the age or nation; and if the Hebrew prophets were driven to reconcile it with the moral government of the world, they must have expressed their deepest convictions in language which subsequent generations can

easily appropriate. In this respect, the little Book of Nahum is full of the ripest teaching for the present age, and the careful Bible reader will be richly repaid who tries to recall and apply to modern conditions its far-reaching conclusions.

I

Of Nahum himself we know next to nothing. He is called the Elkoshite or inhabitant of Elkosh ; but where this village was is altogether uncertain. There are no fewer than three places that claim to be the birthplace of the Prophet—the likeliest of these being Alkush, a considerable village not far from Nineveh, where a building is still shown, called the tomb of Nahum. If he actually did reside near Nineveh, as one of the captive Jews who were carried away by Sargon after the fall of Samaria, it would help to explain how he was able to describe as an eye-witness the siege-operations that were carried out against that "city of blood." Nineveh and its siege are depicted with such vividness and power, that it is hard to believe

that the author was not well acquainted with the city. But the same thing might be urged concerning his description of the Egyptian city, No-amon or Thebes, in chap. iii. His local knowledge of the Egyptian city seems no less precise; and yet no one has felt the necessity of postulating a village in Egypt as the Prophet's birthplace. Besides, if Nahum was a descendant of the ten tribes who were settled on the confluents of the Tigris, it does seem a little strange that he has so little to say about them. It is Judah, and not Samaria, that is called upon to keep her feasts and perform her vows; for the wicked one shall no more pass through her. No doubt it would be interesting to hear the voice of Nahum sounding across the desert from the banks of the Tigris and publishing the glad tidings of the oppressor's fall; but in view of the conflicting considerations already adduced, there is nothing that can be accepted as conclusive. The Prophet's birthplace and permanent residence are quite uncertain.

It is just this fact, however, that suggests

our first invaluable lesson. The man was so forgetful of self in his effort to portray the God of righteousness that he allowed his own personality to recede into the background. He might have said, like John the Baptist, "He must increase, but I must decrease." My birthplace and permanent residence are of no vital significance; but let the inhabitants of Jerusalem see that they give glory to Him who is a stronghold in the day of trouble, the God of Israel whose unsullied righteousness is eternal and immutable. Nahum disappeared as a morning-star in the light of the sun!

And is this not a motto befitting a great nation in the prosecution of a world-war? Whatever may happen to the nation herself, let the kingdom and cause of Jehovah triumph! The truth of this motto is certainly being exemplified by our brave new armies who are willing to sacrifice life itself, in order to break the tyranny that would threaten to overwhelm our Christian civilisation, and to show that right is might, and that national honour must be held

inviolate wherever the British Flag is unfurled. We may be nothing, they seem to say, but that cause is everything. Our unknown graves may never be identified, but even in our death we will help to sound the death-knell of barbarism. Unfurl the flag of freedom on every breeze, and both in living and in dying let us espouse and defend the right! That is the meaning of their heroic stand, both on land and ocean, and well may it animate and hearten us for the more fateful days that may yet be in store. The cause of righteousness must triumph, whatever be the price the nation has to pay. That must increase, though we should decrease. Like Nahum of old we will dare to say, "Behold the triumph of Jehovah's cause"!

II

The hated world-power which Nahum longed to see humiliated was Assyria, with its capital at Nineveh. This was the nation which dominated the affairs of Western Asia for well-nigh a thousand years. Masterful

and aggressive, she ruled all the smaller states with a rod of iron. The barbarities of Assyrian warfare had passed into a proverb. Imagine the fiendish device of flaying men alive! or the inhuman practice of putting out a captive's eyes! or dragging away a batch of exiles with a hook in their nose! One of their kings, Assur-bani-pal, and his queen, are represented on a bas-relief, feasting in their garden, while the head of a conquered Elamite king is hanging from a tree above! Taking the lion as their favourite emblem, they counted it their greatest glory to lash the nations in their fury. Or in Nahum's graphic language, "The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his caves with prey and his dens with ravin." The spirit of Nineveh was simply the spirit of the beast; she was "the bloody city."

And can it be that in the barbarities of modern warfare, as practised and threatened by the modern Teuton, we are confronted by a recrudescence of this old animal ferocity?

Are we face to face with a retrogression not simply to the age of Atilla the Hun, but to the unthinkable savagery of a Sargon or a Sennacherib? Has an erstwhile Christian nation sunk so low, and forgotten her nobler past so absolutely, that all humane feelings being stiffled, she is to scheme and crush and terrorise as if Christianity had never been? If so, there is all the greater need why men like Nahum should arise in all neutral lands no less than in those which are actually at war, and proclaim with no uncertain voice what must be the judgment of all civilised men on such perfidy. The nation that reverts to barbarism like this must be anathematised by all good men. She must be banned by the universal verdict of humanity.

True, it may be, that there is another side to this shield. The prophets of Israel never ceased to warn God's people that however barbarous the Assyrian Empire might be, it was just this terrible scourge that Jehovah would use for chastising and purifying His sinful people. He had allowed the Assyrian

hosts to come in once already and carry away captive the ten tribes; and so far as Nahum could see, they might be allowed to come a second time and pillage and destroy Jerusalem. Indeed, when one comes to examine the words, that is the meaning of the mystic phrase, *Armageddon*. It had its origin in the calamitous defeat of Josiah, the good King of Judah, when he went out to withstand Pharaoh-necho at the fatal field of Megiddo. The mourning over that defeat had also passed into a proverb. Any great grief was likened to the discipline that befell Josiah on Har-Megiddon, or hill of Megiddo, when Israel was humbled before her enemies. The first meaning of the phrase has reference to the purging of the Church, not to the overthrow or discomfiture of the world-powers. In season and out of season the prophets were ever ready to drive home the truth that the world-powers might be used as a scourge to chastise and purify Israel. And this is a side of divine revelation that no true prophet will dare to overlook in any generation. And yet it is but one side of

the truth. The other side is, that if Assyria carry the punishment too far, if she violate every instinct of humanity in the ruthlessness of her conquest, then Assyria herself shall be punished. The smiter shall herself be smitten; and when her doom falls, no one shall bewail her. Nay, instead of lamentation there will be rejoicing. "All that hear the report of thee, clap their hands over thee; for upon whom did not thy wickedness pass continually?"

This is the aspect of the truth that Nahum is raised up to enforce. His whole prophecy is but an ancient rendering of the sentiment:

> "Rome shall perish; write the word
> In the blood that she has spilt;
> Perish hopeless and abhorred,
> Deep in ruin as in guilt."

And as he spake, so it happened. Nineveh fell in the closing years of the seventh century. She began to break up after the death of Assur-bani-pal in 626. Babylon in the south was the first to reassert her independence: but chiefly in the east we have the

rising power of the Medes. For a time the old lion was able to defend himself: and in the first clash of arms the Median king was slain. But by and by the struggle was renewed, and in 606, under King Cyaxares, the Medes carried the city by storm.

III

In the light of this history, the nature of Nahum's message is significant enough. He proclaims with no dubious note that no kingdom founded upon brute force can ultimately triumph. It may seem to prevail for a time and carry everything before it by sheer weight and numbers. But ere long it is seen to carry within its own structure the secret of its dissolution. It has set itself against the rising tide of civilisation. It has chosen might instead of right, and violence instead of equity, and it needs no vision of the faculty divine to tell what shall be the end of such a choice. It shall be swept away before the rising waters of God's outraged law. Like Nineveh before the advent of the Medes, it shall perish in the flames of

its own kindling, and go down to coming generations a heap of shapeless mounds.

But how was Nahum so sure of this principle of moral government? Because the Prophet's view of life is rooted in his theology. It is a man's theology which determines everything else. Read some of Nahum's statements a second time. "The Lord is a jealous God and avengeth . . . and will by no means clear the guilty: the Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. . . . Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken asunder by him." This is the basis of the Prophet's faith that the rule of right shall ultimately triumph. The God of righteousness is a jealous God, and will by no means clear the guilty: He will make a full end of the place thereof, and will pursue His enemies into darkness. Let no power, bent upon its own aggrandisement, cherish any illusion regarding the validity of that truth to-day.

If Assyria devastate Jerusalem or the Teuton devastate Belgium, if speculators plague and harass the poor by gambling with the food supplies of the people, or the employer oppress his servant or the servant his fellow-servant in the insane desire to lord it over others, the heavens are not blind, neither is the rule of righteousness reduced to impotence or apathy. The God of righteousness is a jealous God, and will by no means clear the guilty. He will make a full end of the place thereof, and will pursue His enemies into darkness.

Yet in contrast with this appalling awfulness, read Nahum's great text in chap. i. 7., "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that put their trust in him." No Hosea, the Prophet of love, with his sobbing appeal to Israel, ever uttered a more tender assurance. No evangelist in the New Testament ever penned a more inspiring promise. We may even catch in it a gracious fore-gleam of the Saviour's unrivalled teaching, that they who followed His voice and obeyed His instruction would

never be plucked out of the Father's hand. And it is the same suggestive contrast that is mirrored in the Prophet's name. It means *consolation* or *comforter*; and surely no preacher of doom ever bore so gracious a designation. The doom itself is the comfort. The two ideas, instead of being irreconcilable, are inseparably bound together in one divine unity. Even judgment, when rightly understood, spells comfort for the oppressed. The face of God is set against all manner of wickedness—what a comfort! The rod of the wicked shall not always rest upon the lot of the righteous—what an inspiration and hope! Wrong cannot triumph, for the rule of right is supreme at the heart of the universe; and when the rule of right is supreme in the heart of a man, or in the heart of a nation, these become the two poles of his destiny. The will of God is responded to by the will of man, and the tiny globe of man's life, or of a nation's life, which revolves between, is ever encircled in the sunlight of the divine favour.

This is the abiding comfort which Jehovah

provides for His faithful and purified remnant. Even the murky shadows of judgment are irradiated by the brightness of a great consolation. They who acknowledge Him, even in this world-war, shall never be confounded. They shall live and abide for ever in the light of His countenance.

"So be it, Lord; Thy throne shall never,
Like earth's proud empires, pass away;
But stand, and rule, and grow for ever,
Till all Thy creatures own Thy sway."

VII

THE PROBLEM OF FAITH

VII

THE PROBLEM OF FAITH

HOWBEIT, when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth? Not faith in Mammon or munitions, the pursuit of pleasure or a man's own ability to carve out his way in life—sufficient trust in these things may be found in any age of the world; but faith in the Son of Man Himself as the hope of all the ages, the vindicator of the right and the champion of the oppressed? Shall He find this faith in any real measure when He comes? This is the sorrowful inquiry that dims the brightness of the Second Advent. When He returns in power to avenge His own elect, will He find the torch of faith brightly burning? Who can tell? We can only approach the question from the standpoint of our own generation.

The Great Sacrifice

I

In the present generation there is undoubtedly a strange lack of faith. Account for it as one may, there is no ignoring the fact that multitudes set little or no store by the things that keep us in touch with the eternal world. They toil and eat, enjoy and suffer, sleep and wake, and, by and by, they die, as if no higher state of existence had any attraction for them. And sometimes the trend of their conduct assumes a darker colouring. They spend the sacred hours of the Sabbath in idleness or in folly. Not only before the war began, but after the awful carnage has harrowed our feelings for months, young men and women may still be found spending the hallowed hours in worldly amusement, or journeying far and near in open disregard of any higher obligation, like the pleasure-seekers who drove through a country village the other Sunday, playing cards as they went. And all this while our brave young heroes in the trenches are fighting for dear life that these and such

like dreamers may go unscathed! To say that conduct like this has anything to do with a life of faith is simply to play with words. It is conduct which can only be described in one way: it is the behaviour of the faithless. It is the mark of those who are without God and without hope in the world.

And does it serve any good purpose to suggest, as some have suggested, that the war itself may have been the cause of this serious lack of faith? The war itself has revealed the essential weakness, if not the admitted failure, of the Christian religion. How can there be any real value, it is asked, in a system of belief which has allowed Christian nations not only to ignore the very fundamentals of their faith, but to fly at each other's throats as if they were the veriest heathen? Can there be a wise and beneficent Ruler of the universe in view of a cataclysm like this? Surely, it is added, if the Christian God really existed, and had any influence in the moulding of society, the unspeakable horrors of this great tragedy

would never have been permitted to occur. But the reply to this is obvious. The love of amusement and the desecration of holy time were rampant enough before the war. How then can it be reasonably maintained that the war itself has caused it? Not only so, but in the experience of many the war itself instead of aggravating the evil has proved the one thing necessary to arouse them to the sinfulness of their conduct. It has shown them the guilt of all such selfish enjoyment when the land of their fathers is passing through the greatest crisis in its history. It has done this in all classes, and if the same result has not as yet been produced in these irresponsible pleasure-seekers, it is not because the call of their country is not sufficiently imperious, but simply because their own innate selfishness makes them utterly impervious to the appeal. Truth to tell, the difficulty felt by some of us is not the difficulty of still believing in God despite the present war, but the difficulty of still believing in *man*—in man who can make so little response to the soul-subduing urgency

of the times. Driving and card-playing on the Christian Sabbath, while our brave young Trojans are scaling the heights around the Dardanelles! why, it is enough to make one lose all respect for, and faith in, the reasonableness of human nature.

For the amazing character of this lack of faith is not yet exhausted. It may be probed a little deeper. It assumes, on the one side, that in times of peace when everything is normal, the Christian God should *not* interfere in human affairs. Men ought to be permitted to conduct their business and spend their Sabbaths as they think best. On the other hand, if there should arise any danger of a great European war, it affirms no less confidently that the God of the Christian religion *should intervene*. For, of course, a great war may be a serious drain on our resources. It may curb our pleasures, challenge our comfort, and grievously modify our gains. Hence if such a war should burst forth, and the Christian God has done nothing to prevent it, it can only make it more difficult for us to maintain the Christian

belief: the form of faith which has failed to promote or safeguard our interests can only be discredited! How does such an argument sound when it is set forth in unaffected prose? Does it not lay bare the amazing arrogance on which the whole assumption is based? The arrogance is so amazing that one cannot but repeat the retort that one's main difficulty is not so much to believe in God despite the present war, as to retain one's instinctive belief in the reasonableness of human nature. How can any one find it easy to cherish that belief in view of so palpable a piece of human folly? Heaven help our country in its hour of sore need if it depended on the hirelings who have given up their faith in God! When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth? Yes, God grant that He may, else home and Church and nation will all alike perish. This is one way of approaching the great subject of faith: there may be multitudes who only remind us of its lack.

II

But turning now to those who have espoused the cause of their country, and are fighting and praying for the nation's good, we pass, as if by magic, into a totally new world. If faith as a motive-force in humanity was in danger of going to pieces amid the anomalies of pleasure-seeking and gain, that faith is at once reborn and illumined with new light when touched by the heroism of our eager young recruits. To speak of the difficulties of still believing in God in the presence of their willing self-surrender is impossible. Their action is really the death-warrant of doubt. For, after all, it is the flower of the nation who have responded to the nation's call—not unwilling conscripts who must sullenly dree their weird whether they are inspired by the glow of faith or not—not conscripts, but willing freemen from college, counting-house, workshop, lowland farm, and highland glen, who have all nobly responded to the call of duty without a fear or qualm. Many

of those men we knew in Sunday school and Bible class, and to suggest that they listened to the imperious call of patriotism, but devoid of the faith that consecrates, is simply incredible. No thoughtful mind can believe it. In the hour of their enlistment, faith may not have been the reasoned thing which afterwards it may become in the trenches, but that the thing itself is the inner spring of all their heroism cannot reasonably be doubted. Even in the hour of their first great committal it was the one sacred touch that told.

And what is the deeper and more reasoned faith that may come to them in the trenches? For the comfort of those who are already anxious about their loved ones, let us try to find an answer. What is the faith that may well be born on the battlefield? Are we wrong in suggesting that it may be found in the story of that other great military soul —the Roman centurion? He argued that because he had behind him the whole weight of the Roman Empire, he could exercise a marvellous authority over others. He could

say to this one, Go, and he goeth ; and to another, Come, and he cometh ; and to his servant, Do this, and he doeth it. And then with a swift flash of insight he saw that the same reasoning might be applied to Jesus. He, too, had behind Him a mighty power, even the whole weight of high heaven, and living as He did under that authority, *His* word must be with power. Turning to the Prophet of Nazareth, he could only exclaim, "Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." And when Jesus heard it, and realised what the man had tried to express, He marvelled, saying, "Verily I have not found *so great faith*, no, not in Israel." And yet, in essence, what was the centurion's faith? Simply the power of understanding and resting on Jesus in the light of his own military experience. Jesus was a man under authority as he, the centurion, was ; and therefore, men could come to Him and build up all their confidence upon Him with a faith that could overcome the world. And is this to be one of the heart-stirring results of the present European War? that, amid the burst-

ing shrapnel, men are learning to understand and to trust the divine Son of Man in the light of *their* military experience? They may not be able to express it in words, as the centurion did, but is this not the meaning of their herculean efforts? They, too, are men who are willing to face danger, and to endure hardness even unto death, as *He* did; and therefore in the hour of their supreme agony they may betake themselves to Him. They did not realise it before as they might have done, or confess it with the lip in times of peace; but now in the hour of battle, and it may be the hour of death, they will do it with the life. They will bring their sacrifice, such as it is, under the shield of His divine sacrifice; and mayhap the great Father of all will accept their offering as overshadowed and subsumed under His! All that may not be the language of their lips; but in view of the fact that the surrender of the life is infinitely more than any mere confession of the lips, may not that be the interpretation of Him who not only marvelled at the insight of the Roman centurion,

but who Himself sacrificed His own life for the sake of others? This is faith as wrought out in the school of experience and suffering, and finding it in trench and hospital alike, well may the same voice be heard, saying, "Verily, I have not found so great faith, no, not in the Churches." For in a connection like this, the only faith that counts is the faith that suffers. As Geo. MacDonald reminded us long ago in our youth, "Faith is obedience, not confidence" (*The Marquis of Lossie*). It is the surrender of the life, not the acquiescence of the mind; or, as James, the Lord's brother, had already taught in his own emphatic way, "Faith without works is dead." And instead of the present war raising difficulties in the way of this faith, why, it is proving itself to be the one crucible in which every good bit of metal is at once purified and approved. When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth? Yes, after the present fiery ordeal has wrought its perfect work. Through that far-spreading but also purifying flame man shall yet find God and his brother.

III

In fine, he shall find the peerless Son of Man, who, as the vindicator of the right and the champion of the oppressed, has come even in this present war to espouse the cause of His own elect. Faith in man has always this as its necessary corollary and goal. Man was made in the divine image; and when once a nation's faith has been reborn and reinstated by the splendid loyalty of its sons, it is not only the mountains above the vale of Chamouni that thunder *God*: even the howitzers along the plains of Flanders re-echo and enforce the revelation. In a word, we are brought face to face with the God of judgment. For in keeping with the awe-inspiring character of this manifestation, one is probably right in suggesting that revelation through war is always more or less a revelation in judgment. It is a distinct foreshadowing of what may yet be consummated in the Second Advent. The eternal Judge has even now erected His throne among the

nations, and is already adjudicating between the parties. Heroic souls are assuredly assigned to honour, while those who are wedded to gain or pleasure are no less summarily rejected. There is no escape from the unerring sweep of this infallible moral government. The God of righteousness is already abroad in the land, and the sheep even in this life are being set on His right hand and the goats on His left. And in the light of this unfailing scrutiny those who stand for righteousness can afford to face with courage the new era which is about to dawn upon our modern civilisation, believing that faith, and faith alone, has the key of the West-land in its keeping. In the beautiful lines of the mill-girl poetess of America :

"Faith finds her path through many a starless night,
And without wonder meets the coming dawn:
With confidence she journeys toward the light,
And as she goes the darkness is withdrawn."

When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth? Yes, if the Second Advent takes place at the close of the

European War, He shall find this torch of faith burning brightly. For by terrible things in righteousness He is teaching the nations that they cannot do without His gentle rule; and they will yet turn from their suicidal trust in big battalions and do honour and homage to Him in His gentleness. This is the faith that will yet cause the peerless Son of Man to wonder. The nations, like their representatives in the trenches, will at last understand and value the sufferings of Jesus. How? Through the bitterness and perplexity of their own. If they have given up of their best to vindicate the cause of righteousness, so has God, the Everlasting Father. He has given up His best. Their sufferings and sacrifices are but the far-off reflection of His; and realising that the divine and human factors have at length been made one through pain, they will see it to be for their truest uplifting in future, not to lord it over others, but to travel the way of Gethsemane and the Cross. This is the fair vision on which the Son of Man will yet lift up His eyes in the

Second Advent: and as He draws near in power to espouse the cause of His own elect, this will be the outcome of the scrutiny—"Verily, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

The Lord hasten it in His time!

VIII

THE NEED OF PATIENCE

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The present war has been rightly described as a war of endurance. After many months of incessant toil, when a favourable issue to the war seems as far off as ever, the nation must brace itself for harder tasks and more heroic struggles by cultivating the patience that endures. But what is patience? In the light of the Apostle's luminous illustrations it may mean three things: (1) Resignation to the ever-wise will of the Eternal; (2) Unswerving adherence to what one conceives to be right; (3) A calm and unshaken confidence in the ultimate triumph of divine righteousness when God brings forth His age-long purpose as the light. Christian patience is a concept peculiarly rich and complex: it

is submission, loyalty, and hope (James v. 7–11).

I

It is submission to the ever-wise will of the great Husbandman. This is the meaning of the Apostle's first illustration drawn from the work of the farmer. "Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain." Any dry season in our own country districts gives fresh point and interest to this illustration. What can the farmer do in a season of drought to hasten the sprouting and ripening of the grain? Little or nothing. He has faithfully done his part when he has committed the seed to a carefully prepared soil. He must be content now to leave it to the favourable influences of nature, until, after he has received the early and latter rain—the one beginning in October in Palestine, and the other in March, the one helping the seed to sprout and the other aiding the filling of the ear—he at last gazes upon the fruit of

his labour and the reward of his patience in a God-given harvest.

If men thus exercise patience, and must exercise it, in the fields of the farmer, why not also in the wider fields of a nation's destiny? Does any one suppose that this higher kind of husbandry is left to a species of haphazard? Can any one believe that the divine Husbandman is somehow unconcerned in this great European upheaval? Is the breaking up of the fallow ground by the ploughshare of war, and the shedding of our fresh young blood—like the blood of the martyrs which became the seed of the Church—and the watering of the seed by the tears of those who have already given of their best; is all this higher husbandry to fail of its God-given result? Who can believe it? In those wider fields of history we are dealing with the moral government of the world, and in that realm the issue is even more certain than in the annual ingathering of the crops. In the natural world, as every season of drought has shown us, there are many slips between the cup and the lip. Un-

propitious weather may blast the hopes of the husbandman. The locust and the canker-worm may come in and devastate the crops. These things sometimes occur in the fields of nature, so that in spite of his skill and praiseworthy patience, the farmer, at least in measure, may miss his reward. But there is no similar uncertainty in moral husbandry —"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." No locust or mildew can come in between the sowing and the reaping in this sphere—between sowing to the flesh and reaping the whirlwind, or sowing unto the Spirit and of the Spirit reaping life eternal. Here, indeed, is one of the truths which never can be shaken. No one can turn back the waters of an advancing civilisation. Barbaric methods in war may try to do so for a season, but the attempt is utterly futile. Every Canute who would dare to stem the tide can only cover himself with confusion. Hence they who fight for freedom, righteousness, and honour must prevail at the last, while they who deify their own might, and glory in the ruthlessness of

their conquest, must be overwhelmed in defeat.

It is here we feel the value of a resigned Christian patience. If the forces of evil have not as yet been discomfited, or the triumph of righteousness assured, it is not because the great Husbandman has somehow left the field, but because some greater good is being prepared for humanity than all the counsels of statecraft could devise. The longing for a speedy victory is not to imperil this. For if it really be the case that, unknown to ourselves, divine providence has brought us to one of the great turning-points in history, we may rest assured that, as a nation and as individual men, we will not be allowed to pass that point until the great ends for which we have been led thither have been duly and divinely served. Meanwhile the first element in the Apostle's doctrine of patience is not hard to find. What can the child of God do in face of the problems that now confront the nation? He can do what the farmer does after he has committed his seed to the soil. He can wait with

patience for the early and latter rain. In religion no less than in husbandry, in the endurance of trial no less than in the sowing of seed, he can count on the promised aid of the great Husbandman, persuaded that the divine strength shall yet be made perfect in weakness, and that both the early and latter rain shall be granted. Man is weak, even with all his munitions, but God is mighty; and therefore Christian patience can be resigned.

II

It is loyalty to what one conceives to be right. This is the meaning of the Apostle's second illustration drawn from the example of the prophets. "Take my brethren the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction and of patience." There may be many in these days who are harbouring the thought that they are suffering wrongfully. They have surrendered their best, they are facing the increased cost of living, they are passing, in every sense, under the shadow of a great

national eclipse, and all to serve, as they believe, the ambition, selfishness, and culpable blundering of those in high places who have been responsible for plunging the whole of Europe into war! Why should this be? Is this not a case of the innocent suffering instead of the guilty? Yes, the Apostle would answer, you have a perfect right to state the matter in this terse way if you are so minded. That is precisely the way in which many of the early Christians were inclined to regard it, when unscrupulous capitalists kept back the hire of the labourer by fraud, and when the military despots of Rome meted out but scant consideration for the rights of conquered races. Regarded in this social and purely temporal way, the toiling thousands have good cause to say that they are sacrificing and suffering wrongfully.

But is this the only way in which a great war may be regarded? Is this the way in which the Apostle James would regard it? No, his view of life and destiny is entirely different. One may use all the hard words of which he is capable in denouncing the

unscrupulous methods of those who have plunged the nations into war, but let no one think that he has faced all the facts when he has maligned and pilloried these! These are but the small dust in the balance. These are but the puny kinglets who are vain enough to imagine that they can withstand the inflow of the sea. And this, it may be, is the only level on which the major part of the daily Press is content to discuss the great world tragedy. It is all a matter of time and a concern of earth. One may scan with eagerness all that is written morning by morning and not find a hint that soars into the infinite, not a gleam of spiritual insight that can rise any higher than a Zeppelin!

What, on the other hand, if this solemn crisis has brought the nations within the sweep of a great moral development? A moral development, let it never be forgotten, which is meant to discipline the nations, to purify the Churches, to elevate the home, and to broaden and deepen the individual life, until as the gracious outcome a new civilisation will be seen in the earth—a

civilisation in which the teaching of the lowly Nazarene will at last be honoured and approved. Would not this set the suffering of all classes in another and purer light? And would not the plea that any class should be exempted from the necessary discipline mean that they were putting themselves outwith the scope of a glorious uplifting? The suffering itself is tragic enough. No one has any wish to minimise the horrors to which a great war may subject the nations of the earth; but these horrors may be endured in view of this higher spiritual development, and this brings those who are exercised by them into line with a patriotic succession of which any class or nation may well be proud. It brings them into line with the holy prophets who also suffered wrongfully, but in suffering built up the kingdom of God in their own generation and left the world better than they found it. These were the heroic souls who, in unswerving loyalty to what they conceived to be right,

> "built up our faith in man,
> And lit the ages as they ran."

No patriot can turn aside the point of this prophetic illustration. No more in these modern days than in apostolic times can any class assume that they are the first to exercise the grace of unswerving loyalty in the midst of manifold trials. They are only doing what the holy prophets have always done, lived and suffered for the cause of right as men who have resolutely counted the cost. And it is this thought which enters into the very essence of Christian patience. "This is acceptable," says another Apostle, "if for conscience toward God a man endureth griefs, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye sin and are buffeted for it, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye shall take it patiently, this is acceptable with God." A good conscience toward God is the secret of endurance.

III

Finally, Christian patience is inspired and transfigured by hope. Is this not the meaning of the Apostle's third illustration, drawn from the unique example of the patriarch of

Uz? "Behold, we count them blessed which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." It may occur to most readers that in the prosecution of war there is not much of either pity or mercy that can be accredited to either combatant. War is a ruthless business from start to finish. Those who return from the front, and who have seen something of its horror, do not care to speak about it, and refuse to portray in any sense the atrocities which are perpetrated in its name. The deeds done in the name of war may well make a Christian civilisation blush! That, however, is not the *end*—the end of the Lord. That is only a means, repelling and horrifying in all truth, but still a means working towards a further end—an end which will at once assert eternal providence and justify the ways of God to men. For, stung by the bitter reflection that those years of enmity have retarded the coming age of gold, the disciplined nations will yet wipe out the memory of that

estrangement in a covenant of brotherly love.

Is this the reason why the Lord's brother harked back to the luminous example of the patriarch Job? He chose it because in the working out of that old-world drama the bitterness of strife passed into the ideal of brotherhood. The captivity of Job was turned when he prayed for his friends—not when he strove with them in wordy warfare, and sought to prove that all their cherished notions were nothing better than words of wind; but when with true instinct and deep, genuine compassion he prayed with and for them. This is the reason for the Apostle's preference. The Old Testament story spoke of a time when not only in vision but in glorious reality suffering saints would find that the end of the Lord was worth all the toil and struggle, that pity and tender mercy would yet fill the earth and change the darkness of trial into the brightness of the morning. Thus the eye of patience could turn to the future and glow with the vision of far-opening horizons. Men could dream

of a time when all these war voices would cease, and when resignation, loyalty, and hope would be glorified.

And here is the practical value of such a hope. The children of faith enter into the sweetness of this beatitude even now. "Behold, we count them *blessed* which endure." Not only in heaven after the endurance is past, and not only in that new age of the world when the present tribulation will have wrought its perfect work: but even now while the storms last and the mists and shadows are all around them, the men of vision are rightly accounted blessed when inspired by the confidence of so sublime a hope. Other hearts fear and fret, as they follow daily the swaying fortunes of the war, but those souls which have caught a glimpse of the far-off divine event to which the whole creation moves can afford to be the true optimists, for they have learned the secret of a perfect trust and are calmed by the patience that endures.

"*Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord.*"

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